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Serbia & American Grand Strategy: Finding a Place for Serbia and Montenegro in a US-Dominated Balkan Security Architecture

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The election of Vojislav Kostunica as the new president of the Yugoslav federation will undoubtedly present the citizens and political elites of Yugoslavia with an opportunity to re-conceptualize and re-articulate the political relations that define the current common state between Serbia and Montenegro. Concurrently, the new president will be confronted with many difficult obstacles in his quest to solidify democratic institutions and the rule of law in the Yugoslav federation. However, let us presuppose that the political differences between Serbia and Montenegro will be reconciled and that the issue of Kosovo and Metohija will continue to be unresolved with the international community attempting to establish a dialogue between Serbian and Albanian political representatives. The first question that the new president will need an answer to is, does the international community support substantial autonomy for Kosovo within Serbia or does it support the American plan to take Kosovo out of Serbia and make it a constituent republic in some new, possibly temporary, Yugoslav arrangement? With Dr. Kostunica expected to arrive in Washington in November, one may argue that the new president needs to come to Washington with a plan not only to receive financial assistance, but with questions regarding the American position on the security architecture that Washington has facilitated and institutionalized in this part of Europe.

Since the end of the Cold War, a new security architecture has emerged and been institutionalized in the Balkan Peninsula. This has largely occurred due to the emergence of new states and the influence of world powers and regional powers in this part of Europe. This new architecture has also largely emerged with little or no media attention in Western countries. Confronted with these new geopolitical realities, the emerging states in the Balkans have signed over approximately 60 military agreements on defense cooperation with neighbouring states and with state actors outside of this geographic region in Europe. Thus, the Balkan region has become the only region in the world where so many military agreements on defense cooperation have been consummated in such a short time period.

The relative paradox here is that these military agreements present serious questions about whether or not the current security architecture in the Balkans is intended and able to promote regional stability and peace over the long term. What is striking about developments in the Balkans

is that little effort has been made to analyze the substantive context of most of these military agreements. The only realistic attempt at examining this issue in Serbia has been attempted by the Belgrade based Independent Centre for Geopolitical Studies (JUGOISTOK). While there is a pressing need to assess the role of these military agreements, one should rather briefly concentrate on illustrating and elucidating how the United States has attempted to deal with developments in the Balkan region.

At the end of the Cold War, the United States was in an unprecedented position to lead the international community and effectively influence the international agenda. However, in order for effective and lasting peace to prevail, there was a realization in Washington that in order to be successful, the United States was mandated to pursue a policy of multilateralism with its allies. This included engaging states like Russia and NATO allies in order to build a transatlantic consensus on how to achieve a lasting and just peace in areas of the world that were troubled by political conflict. While a policy of engaged multilateralism was the preferred method of exercising American leadership and influence, the establishment in Washington was also well aware of the strategic imperative that the United States continue to maintain a limited presence on the European continent. In order to achieve this strategic goal, the United States publicly adhered to the policy of multilateralism, while in reality, the US pursued its own foreign and security policy in the Balkan region.

Harold Mackinder pioneered the idea that the Central-East European heartland is the vital springboard for the attainment of continental domination in Eurasia.[1] He popularized this concept in the following aphorism: "Who rules Eastern Europe commands the heartland, who rules the heartland commands the world island, who rules the world island commands the world." With most of the worlds population situated on the Eurasian continent, with its vast human and natural resources, the interests of the United States in maintaining its hegemonic position in world affairs will depend on its ability to decisively influence this strategic continent. This is why the Bismarckian strategy advocated by many is the premise on which American foreign and security policy rests today.

Therefore, in order for the United States to maintain its engagement on the world stage, it was vital for her to have a decisive presence on the Eurasian landscape. This is why the American presence and influence in Europe is crucial to American national interests. Without such a presence, the United States would be excluded from this vast landscape and would cease to be a major factor in the immediate affairs of Eurasia. The United States has a direct interest in promoting the institutions of NATO because it is the most significant transatlantic institution that binds the United States to a military and political presence in Europe. Without NATO and American leadership of this transatlantic organization, American interests in Eurasia would be in question, but not necessarily compromised since America has an abundance of military bases in Turkey. NATO and American leadership in this organization are, however, vital if America is to sustain its dominance in Eurasia and influence the process of 'democratic transitions' and 'consolidations' not only in Europe but in the former Soviet space as well.

With the reunification of Germany and its 'firm' commitment to Europe and the integrative process of the European community, the necessary conditions were created for the United States to maintain its hegemonic position in Europe. However, a reunited Germany, with a population of roughly 80 million, along with a large industrial base, presented the United States with an opportunity to continue and enhance a strategic partnership with Germany in Europe. There is an overwhelming consensus in Washington today that Germany should become the leader or economic engine of a united Europe. This preference for Germany by the foreign policy establishment has enabled the United States to continue to use Germany and Turkey as vital geopolitical pivots on the Eurasian continent. However, it should be noted that European integration does not

solely depend on Germany alone. It also depends on the ability of France and Germany to reconcile their differences and on their ability to harness a co-operative relationship. European integration without France or Germany will be in doubt unless the United States takes the interests of both of these countries into consideration.

In fact, the French who see themselves as a natural leader of Europe dating back to the Napoleonic era, have at times been at odds with the United States over common security and foreign policy issues. When the Cold War ended, Washington Post columnist Charles Krauthammer, stated that "the unipolar moment meant" that with the close of the century's three great wars (WWI, WWII and the Cold War), an ideologically pacified North "sought security and order by aligning its foreign policy behind that of the United States."[2] As the United States seeks to promote and enhance Germanys position in Europe, the French and the British to a lesser degree have begun to pursue foreign policy objectives outside the realm of the Atlantic Alliance and sometimes in direct conflict with the United States. For example, the French have sought to gain contracts in Iran for the establishment of an oil pipeline and have been active in trying to get the sanctions regime on Iraq lifted.

However, where the interests of the alliance have really come into question is over the situation in the former Yugoslavia. In the wars of the former Yugoslavia, Germany has largely supported its former World War II proxies, those being the Croatians, Bosnian Moslems, and the ethnic Albanians in Serbia at the expense of the Serbs who historically opposed German expansionism in the two World Wars of the last century. The French, the British, and the Russians, have at times openly voiced their opposition against such a policy while the United States has to a large degree fallen in line with the historic German and Turkish positions on developments in the south of Europe. Whether or not this is a concession to Germany and Turkey is not the question, but any solution in the former Yugoslavia must take into consideration not only the interests of Germany and Turkey, but also those countries of Europe that used to be closest to the United States, Britain and France.

The complexity of this argument is convincing if one uses the Dayton Accord for Bosnia as a paradigm in which to see great power relations at play. The achievement of Dayton was that it became a compromise whereby the maximalist aims of the three warring factions were not realized in the final peace agreement. It also required a consensus on the part of the Contact Group before negotiations could begin in Dayton, Ohio. One might hypothesize that the two questions the Europeans are asking nowadays are, does the rearmament of the Bosnian Moslem side by the United States, through the Train and Equip program, imply a commitment by the US

to the division of Bosnia accepted in Dayton or does it imply something else? Furthermore, does the failure of international forces in Kosovo to completely demilitarize the KLA imply a commitment by the United States to the peace agreement established to end the war or does it imply something else as well? What one may believe is that the final decision has not been taken and that is a possibility that cannot be ignored. Moreover, the various ethnic groups in this part of the world can attribute the ambiguity that has arisen from this American policy to the lack of co-operation and implementation of the Dayton Accords in Bosnia and of the peace agreement in Serbia.

On the other hand, the pressures on Washington to honour the compromise of Dayton and the peace concluded at the end of the Kosovo war with Serbia are still quite considerable. However, if the United States was to manufacture a round two in which the Moslems beat the Serbs and Croats in Bosnia and if Kosovo was to be *de jure* and *de facto* detached from Serbia, there would undoubtedly be a price to pay in the relationship with Britain, France and Russia. Maybe it is a price that Washington will be prepared to pay, or perhaps Washington believes that the Germans and the Moslem world are much more important than the old allies, the Western European fringe that used to be closest to the United States. If this scenario were to unfold, then the conflict in Bosnia and the conflict in Kosovo will have proven something not about the Balkans, but rather, it will have proven something about the major players in Europe and their relationship to Washington.

It is obvious that Dr. Kostunica's immediate concerns are focussed on dealing with and solidifying the economic and political transition that is taking place in Yugoslavia. The European Union has led the way in helping Yugoslavia come out of international isolation in order to begin the process of reintegration into Europe and into the international community at large. However, before Serbia and Montenegro can truly contribute to Balkan peace and stability, Dr. Kostunica will eventually need to have answers from Washington about the role of Serbia and Montenegro in the increasingly American-dominated security architecture in the Balkans. Unfortunately, where the Balkans are concerned to date, the United States has until now pursued a policy of punishing, demonizing and disenfranchising the Serbian people by refusing to recognize their basic human rights and right to self determination. Dr. Kostunica has recently raised the issue of co-operation or resistance to the international community: Serbia could take either of these two roads. However, one may believe that the answer for Serbia and Montenegro does not lie in these two highly ambiguous terms. The answer lies in Dr. Kostunica's ability to ascertain from Washington realistic answers to the questions posed above.

Notes

1. Brzezinski, Zbigniew. *The Brand Chessboard: American Primacy and its Geostrategic Imperatives* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997) 38.

2. Wittkopf, R. Eugene. *The Future of American Foreign Policy* (New York: St. Martin's Press) 5.

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